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## AUTOREFERAT

# Impact of choral singing in the overall musical education of children

(Comparative research in secondary schools  
in Kosovo and Macedonia)

PhD Dissertation in Musicology

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## ABSTRACT

This study **explores** the **actual situation** of the **functioning** of **choirs** in **general education** (lower secondary school 6-9). The **views** and **practices** of **teachers** are **studied** regarding the organization of music education outside the classroom, respectively in the school choir. How the teachers make **the selection of the choristers**, the **choral literature**, **practical work** with choirs, **technical** or **professional difficulties** encountered in working with the choir, and what **opportunities** for **further** musical and overall **development** the **participation** in the **choir** provides to students, these are the issues that will be explored in this study. The study **aims** to **identify** and **analyze** these **factors** by which it paves the way for their **further improvement**.

The **design** of this research was conducted by the combination of **quantitative** and **qualitative methods** (content analysis and teacher interviewing, including detailed analysis of 10 choral songs and interviews with choral teachers). The research was conducted with 65 choral teachers of various schools in Kosovo and Macedonia.

Based on the results of this study, the **similarities** and **differences** between **teachers** in **Kosovo** and **Macedonia** were **analysed** and **compared**, and also **comparisons** and **analyzes** were made between the **two countries** concerned.

**Recommendations** arising from this study are dedicated to relevant institutions in Kosovo, which should aim at **encouraging** and **supporting** the **development** of **choral singing** in **general education** in **lower secondary school** students (grades 6-9).

Key words: *Choral singing, school choirs, choral repertoire, choir rehearsals, choral teacher, chorister.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The cultivated music in Kosovo began after the end of World War II, which was primarily represented by vocal works and performances. Throughout the years in parallel with the creation of the more favorable conditions in education, in the schools there were provided opportunities for the development of out-of-class music activities. One of the most important forms of musicking within these activities is the school choir. While, due to general socio-cultural conditions, there was a late start, however, until 1989, there was a satisfactory development of choral singing within general education. In the 70s until late 80s (1972-1989) there were institutionalized elementary school choir competitions, with wide participation and a quality level of interpretation. Initially, competitions were organized at the municipal level, and then the selected choir represented the municipality at the Provincial Competitions (as they were called at the time). While, the choir that won the first place in these competitions represented Kosovo in the Republican and federal competitions of the former Yugoslavia. From 1989-1999, for a whole decade, all cultural and institutional life was paralyzed as a consequence of the the situation that our country was going through at that time.

While, from 2000 to the present, there has been marked a continuous progress of choral singing in the professional field, in general education there is stagnation or even regress. To this day, there is no reorganization of the competitions that we had years back. The organization of these competitions would reflect the work of school choirs and would affect the quality of work of these choirs.

In recent years, in our capital city, Prishtina, to mark special cultural days, meetings are organized of choirs of all schools in the municipality of Prishtina. The appearance of the choirs in these events is not of competitive character, it is rather of symbolic and festive character. In these public appearances it is noticed that the choirs are not well-organized and lack sounding quality when interpreting choral works.

Based on this situation of choral singing in general education these issues should be explored and studied to look at the reasons why choral singing within general education is at such level. Different theoretical approaches of local and international level were also analyzed, with the aim of identifying and determining the appropriate models that will be important to enhance the quality of choirs in the schools of the country.

### Background on the issue

To provide students with a higher level of artistic interpretation and further musical development, besides the classroom music teaching, special educational forms are carried out in schools, organized outside the music education class. One of the most important forms of special teaching in school is the school choir. As a form of collective musicking, the school choir is one of the main activities of music education, it is a very complex form, suitable for the realization of many components, both musical (development of musicianship), as well as the overall development of the personality of the students.

While the benefits the students acquire from participating in school choir are well known, however, this music activity is not well developed in the country's general schools. In our current reality there is created the impression that choral singing in general education is represented in a very formal way, no due attention is paid to the qualitative aspect of the interpretation but rather to the decorative aspect.

The functioning of the choirs in general education has turned into a trendy thing, namely it is done only to "add grandiosity" and massivity to podiums in school programs, and not to offer the public a quality program of artistic value. Participation in the choir is a very valuable experience for the students, enriching them with new skills other than those gained during the classroom music education. So the school choir is one of the most massive forms of music education, through which the choristers refine the singing culture, expand their musical knowledge, and develop their general knowledge.

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## Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to identify the actual situation of the functioning of choirs as well as the quality of the work done with the choirs at the school level. As a teacher of music education since 1999 and as the leader of many different amateur and professional children and adult choirs<sup>1</sup>, I have noticed various challenges which often have directly influenced the functioning and quality of school choirs in general.

Musical education is a complex and wide-ranging research field that cannot be addressed within a single study. Therefore, this study focuses on studying the dimension of music education (music activities) outside the classroom, such as the school choir.

Responsibility for the formation and continuous work with the school choir falls on the teacher starting from grades 1-5, who have basic background in the music field. Also, a greater responsibility lies with music teachers or 'specialists' in the lower secondary level (grades 6-9).

In general, this study aims to:

- Identify the functioning of the choirs in general education within the special forms of out-of-class music teaching.
- Assess the level of functioning of choirs based on school practices (how they organize the school choir, how they choose the choristers, how they choose the repertoire, etc.).
- Highlight the choral songs that the choral teacher performs with the choir.
- Analyze choral songs in terms of music and content.
- Analyze what opportunities for musical and overall development choral singing creates for choristers.
- To identify, from the perspectives of the choral teachers themselves, what are the difficulties encountered in working with choir.

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<sup>1</sup> Such as: the children's choir of Music School-Gjilan, the choir of the lower secondary school "Third Millennium", the girls' choir of the high school "Mehmet Akif", the choir of the secondary Music School- Gjilan, the girls' choir at Faculty of Education – Prishtina, the choir of the city of Gjilan, choir of the Faculty of Musicology at AAB.

- Identify the position of choral singing in the current curriculum.
- To compare the differences regarding choral singing in the schools of Prishina and Skopje (Kosovo and Macedonia).

### The importance of the study

The importance of this research lies in the fact that it will identify and analyze the factors influencing the functionalization of the choir in the schools, by identifying modern approaches to how the choir should be empowered at school level and beyond.

### Research questions

This study is planned and organized on the basis of the following research questions:

- How do choral teachers organize their current practices of working with choirs?
- What songs are performed with the choir? (What opportunities for further musical development participation in the choir provides to students?)
- What specific elements and resources would help improve the quality of the choral program at your school?
- What is the position of choral singing in the curriculum (in general education in Kosovo and Macedonia)?
- What are the differences regarding the choral development in general education between Kosovo and Macedonia?



## II. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF CHORAL SINGING

The second chapter is divided into three parts and contains theoretical data from literature review. The first part contains historical data from choral singing during historical developments of music culture, then continuing with the historical overview of the choral singing in Kosovo, and the historical development section ends with the history of choral singing in Macedonia. The second part of the second chapter contains theoretical data for the role of choral singing in children-students' lives, the social function of choral singing and educational function of choral singing.

### The role of choral singing in children-students' lives

Singing in choir is an ideal way to engage large groups of students to participate in music where “individuals must subordinate themselves to the group and must work together as dedicated team”<sup>2</sup>. The benefits for choristers from participation in choir are multidimensional and comprehensive, “and certainly, there is no doubt today that skilled actions like choral singing give children a way to make sense of the world around them. When child sings, the musical experience provides feedback or information to the child about herself and the world around her”.<sup>3</sup> By singing in the choir, students will, among other things, be introduced to a large number of songs of genuine musical values, which will undoubtedly expand and enrich their overall musical culture, “choral music is a way of educating children musically through skillful participation in the producing, practicing and performing music”.<sup>4</sup> Participation in the choir also helps students deepen their general knowledge, and at the same time complement their aesthetic education. According to Lyndell, there are “reports that students who participate in a one-hour

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<sup>2</sup> Ashley. Martin, (2015) *Singing in the Lower secondary school*. United Kingdom: Oxford, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Doreen. Rao, (1991) *Choral Music Experience*. Volume 4, *Teaching Children Through Choral Music Experience*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

weekly session enhance not only their musical skills but also their personal skills and confidence level”<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, students who sing in the school choir, through continuous rehearsals and artistic performance, gain the opportunity to learn and perform songs of various content that stimulate their emotional sensibility and create an array of colorful emotions, while experiencing musical and artistic works.

### Social function of choral singing

In general, choral singing, in addition to musical and intellectual skills, also develops the sense of belonging, cooperation-socialization and responsibility, “choirs are often experienced as a social group where people can meet and socialize with others and only secondarily as a musical group”<sup>6</sup>. Frequent meetings in group contributes to students getting closer to each other and mobilizes them in achieving common goals, “among the important outcomes of choral music experience for students is the sense of community, producing something together which is greater than any one person could produce alone”<sup>7</sup>, and contributing to the overcoming of “individual ego”, developing the collective consciousness of the choristers and the feeling of responsibility for the common success. Participation in the school choir is an indispensable form for the socialization of choristers, enriching of inter-personal and collegial relations, and the enhancement of civil education in the spirit of tolerance, as exemplary and contributing citizens.

As mentioned above, the function of choral singing is multidimensional, i.e. in addition to educational side it also contains musical, pedagogical, sociological, psychological and cultural-historical and other components.

### Education function of choral singing

School Choir is one of the most massive forms of music education through which the choristers extend their musical knowledge and refine and develop their culture of singing. By participating in the choir they create very valuable experience that complements them with relevant habits, interpretive skills and musical ability. As a form of collective music, choral singing is one of the main activities of musical education suitable for the realization of many

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<sup>5</sup> Lyndell. H, (2010) The enhancement of musical and other learning for both teachers and students through a weekly choir session. *Australian Journal of Music Education*, 1, 58-70.

<sup>6</sup> Faulkner. R., Davidson. J. W, (2006) Men in chorus: Collaboration and competition in homo-social vocal behavior. *Psychology of Music*, 34, p. 219-237.

<sup>7</sup> Doreen. Rao, (1987) Choral Music Experience. Volume1, *Artistry in Music Education*, p. 5.

musical components that contribute to the development of students' musicianship "because pupils learn through skilled action, and because singing is intelligent bodily action requiring judgment, choral music experience is a uniquely powerful means of musical learning"<sup>8</sup>. By participating in the choir, students gain musical experiences that will contribute to their development in all musical aspects-components such as rhythmic, melodic and harmonic sense, enhanced sensitivity to the dynamics, the phrase, range, musical memory etc., because "lessons "about" music develop naturally through active participation in "making" music"<sup>9</sup>.

The group work nature of the choir is more attractive to the choristers and they willingly implement and adopt the musical requirements, "students report that they experience music learning most powerful when they are engaged with other students in activities that develop and challenge their skills, when they are invited to make a music both individually and collectively with their peers, when they have opportunities to interact personally with their teachers, and when they experience several changes in grouping and activity within rehearsal"<sup>10</sup>.

There are many benefits the choristers gain during their choral experience whether they are related to the overall social benefits such as socialization, aesthetic education, creativity, the general cultural and historical aspect etc., and there are also numerous educational benefits associated with general music components.

It should be noted that choral singing as an educational musical activity that is organized outside the classroom is not equally developed in all general schools across different countries. This is conditional and is related to various circumstances whether professional or technical, ranging from the position of choral singing in the curriculum, working conditions, cultural diversity of the surroundings, professional preparedness, etc.

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<sup>8</sup> Doreen. Rao, (1990) Choral Music Experience. Volume3, The Art in Choral Music p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Doreen. Rao, (1987) Choral Music Experience. Volume1, Artistry in Music Education p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Freer. K Patrick, (2009) Getting Started with Middle School Chorus, by MENC p. 59.

The third part in the second chapter of the literature review contains the theoretical and practical aspects which the choral teacher facing during the work with choir as: Organizing a school choir, Choir rehearsals planning, Choosing choral literature, Practical work with school choir, Methodical procedures for teaching choral songs, choir rehearsal and school choir public performances.

### Organizing a school choir

The organizing and functioning of the school choir in most cases depends on the space provided in the school curriculum, as well as other circumstances, whether technical or professional. These factors are decisive in terms of the manner of operation and the quality of the choir. However, the key role in the organization and functioning of the choir is played by the choral teacher along with those who are the most important part of the choir, namely the choir singers or better known as CHORISTERS. Based on this fact, the first work to be done by the choral teacher is choosing the choristers.

### Choosing Choristers

Recruiting students for school performance ensembles can present a challenge, the more so in the present times where “most middle school students are presented with a massive array of choices for use of their extracurricular time. If your choral program functions largely beyond the school day, be prepared to deal with scheduling conflicts with other activities, such as a team sports, clubs, private music and dance lessons, karate, church activities, and family responsibilities”<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, the development of technology, various games on different platforms and applications have become very attractive for students. Therefore, the choral teacher in conformity to the programmatic and professional obligations must find forms that attract the students for becoming part of the choir. This very important work has to be performed with professionalism, as it is well known that it is a very sensitive work because it touches the most intimate part of the student's personality. There are different practices applied by different choral teachers regarding the choosing of students for the choir. Some educators feel that the Junior School choir should be open to all the pupils and that one should not audition the children for the choir. Because in the class music milieu all the pupils have the opportunity to sing and to receive a music education. This is a noble ideal that does not necessarily work in practice. The

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<sup>11</sup> Freer. K Patrick, (2009) Getting Started with Middle School Chorus, by MENC, p. 49.

question than arises “should elementary school choirs be composed of auditioned or no auditioned students?” This is something that shall be determined by the teacher, namely whether to choose the choristers by audition or during the regular music class. In this regard, there are different opinions. Some authors argue that the music class is a source for future choristers where the teacher in regular classes observes the student's musical skills and notes those who meet the "requirements" for participating in the choir and “recruit students for your choir by talking to your classes describing plans for the group”<sup>12</sup>, informing them about musical and non-musical benefits of participating in the choir. If the teacher teaches classes to students and knows the students then classical audition is not necessary because he is in constant contact with them and this can be done in the classroom in ordinary setting, even without the students being aware that their musical skills are being tested because “some teachers believe that the negative influence of pointing out an uncertain singer to his or her peers is immaterial”<sup>13</sup>. Thus, during the classroom lesson, the teacher, on an ongoing basis carefully tests, chooses, and verifies the special abilities of those students who will be included in the choir. That is, the teacher notes their musical dispositions and discovers the gifted students distinguished with their musicality and the components of a beautiful voice such as range, timbre, articulation, etc.

On the other hand, different authors are of the opinion that for the participation of students in the choir should be arranged the audition, “teachers who favor auditioned ensembles feel that auditions give them a chance to discover which students are truly interested in choral music”<sup>14</sup>. A student's participation in the audition process, also indicates that he or she has a strong desire to be in the choir, and “auditioning is valuable musical experience and gives the students confidence in their voices”<sup>15</sup>. However, audition creates and provides realistic opportunities for getting to know the students better, through which we will receive information about the vocal status of each child and “Information gathered individually will result in a composite picture of the group's strengths, deficiencies, and capabilities”<sup>16</sup>, and on the other

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<sup>12</sup> Hohweiler. Martha, (2002) Starting an Elementary –School Choir. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus, p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> Haworth. Janice L., Elementary, (1992) School Choirs and Auditions. Music Educators Journal, 00274321, 19920101, Vol. 79, Issue 4.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Hohweiler. Martha, (2002) Starting an Elementary –School Choir. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus, p. 85.

<sup>16</sup> McRae. W. Shirley, (1991) Directing the Children's Choir. Schilmer Books. N.Y p. 14.

hand the audition enables us “to meet and assess the strength of each student, and to ensure that the choral ensembles are able to perform the chosen repertoire”<sup>17</sup>.

For the holding of the audition, the time and the special venue must be set. Among other things, a good opportunity to inform students about the audition is the application of technology such as web pages, social networks, etc., through which students can be attracted to participate in the audition to become future choristers.

However, in the setting where the audition is to be held, an appropriate environment should be created where students will feel comfortable and “a choral music educator can show hospitality by exhibiting a demeanor of acceptance toward every student who enters the classroom. Hospitality denotes the tone of the classroom environment on a social and emotional level”<sup>18</sup>. Prior to starting the testing of musical skills, it is essential to hold a general pre-audition meeting for all the children wanting to audition in order to explain and demonstrate the procedure. The children will then know exactly what to expect.

### Long-term planning of working with choir

For the realization of a range of complex objectives of working with choir, a purposive, planned and pedagogically arranged work at all levels of work with choir is needed. Planning of working with choir is always interdependent with the level of the choir and needs to be tailored to its specifics, but always aiming for the maximum development of choristers. This also depends on the duration of the choristers’ school choir attendance.\*<sup>19</sup> In order for the work to be as efficient as possible and to achieve a high level of interpretation, the choral teacher must prepare a long-term plan of working with the choir because “over two, three or even four years in choir, students should have the chance to study, rehearse, and perform a balanced repertoire”<sup>20</sup>. Proper long-term planning will help achieve choir goals because for the choral teacher “as well as students, planning a three-year learning cycle make more sense than trying to survive from

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<sup>17</sup> Freer. K Patrick, (2009) Getting Started with Middle School Chorus, by MENC, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Philip. E Silvey, (2014) Reducing Apprehensions of Adolescent Singers in Choral Classrooms, Music Educators Journal March 2014, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup>\* **Clarification:** Viewed in the Kosovo context, lower secondary education in Kosovo lasts four years, i.e 6-9 grade, which means that typically we can have the choristers available during these years.

<sup>20</sup> Batey. L Angela, (2002) Selecting Quality Choral Literature in the High School setting. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus, p. 43.

rehearsal to rehearsal or even from semester to semester”<sup>21</sup>. According to Freer “one of the most important things you can do to help retain your sanity amidst the flurry of activity which accompanies any middle school is to plan your major rehearsal goals over a long periods of time”<sup>22</sup>. The long-term plan includes the plan for the overall organization of the choir starting from: audition, repertoire selection, organization of rehearsals, participation in different performances inside and outside the school, cooperation with parents, cooperation with other cultural institutions, etc. Realization of this the plan will inevitably lead to the success of the school choir. The choral teacher makes the planning and implementation, ranging from long-term (3-4 years) to short-term plans (work plan addressing a choir rehearsal).

If the choral teacher implements long term planning properly, this will in the future result in a successful outcome that will affect the quality and level of choral interpretation. Sometimes the choral teacher may have greater ambitions during planning, which go beyond the realistic capabilities of choir he/she leads. If, eventually, during the implementation of the planned work, we conclude that our goals were overly ambitious, it is necessary that the planning on future goals and plans be revised and restructured.

### Choir rehearsals planning

In addition to the long-term plans drafted by the choral teacher which affect the well-going of the choir, he must also draft the short-term plan of choir rehearsals, as monthly, weekly or daily plan (addressing a single rehearsal). These plans should be understood as purposive activities that contribute to the development of new musical skills and knowledge, “though the student’s musicianship will grow and develop through their active participation in practicing and performing choral music, teachers-educators cannot assume that musical skill and understanding will develop without careful planning and thoughtful teaching”<sup>23</sup>. When planning, the choral teacher sets clear goals “we must know where we are headed both in short and long time – term, and we must be able to articulate these goals to our students so that they can feel a sense of achievement as they accomplish them in rehearsal setting”<sup>24</sup>. During short-term planning, we

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<sup>21</sup> Freer. K Patrick, (2009) Getting Started with Middle School Chorus, by MENC, p. 78.

<sup>22</sup> Freer. K Patrick, (2002) For the First –Year? Teacher: Planning Your Rehearsals. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Doreen. Rao, (1991) Choral Music Experience. Volume 4, Teaching Children Through Choral Music Experience. p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Guelker-Cone. Leslie, (2002) Finding Flow in the Choral Rehearsal. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus, p. 16.

should be careful to adjust our plans to fit the level of choristers, as some of the choristers did not have any musical experience before enrolling in school. However, we always aim at offering maximum opportunities for musical development and overall development to choristers during the choral rehearsals.

In addition to long-term planning (3-4 years) and short-term planning (monthly, weekly), for a successful work, the choral teacher must plan in detail the implementation of a choral rehearsal. This means getting familiar with each point by analyzing all the musical features, such as “matters of form, texture, melody, rhythm, harmony will become apparent to the director in analyzing the piece”<sup>25</sup> He must plan in detail the manner the choral rehearsal will be organized and teach the song to the choristers.

### Choosing Choral Literature

One of the first conditions for successful choir work is the ability to choose your program correctly. There is no question that repertoire selection is one of the most important tasks that choral music educators perform. Through the repertoire we choose, we not only teach curricular content to our students, but we also convey our philosophy in terms of what we believe students need to learn to achieve musical growth. “Is ultimately our responsibility to select the music through which we teach musical elements, help students develop understandings or concepts, and enable them to grow in sensitivity”<sup>26</sup>. Among the many tasks expected of children's choir teachers, one of the most creative work is choosing appropriate repertoire for performing ensembles. An appropriate analysis of the songs presents a challenging task to choral teachers, and this process must be carried out with maturity, because “choosing quality literature is an enormous test of a musicians abilities as well as a time-consuming task”<sup>27</sup>. In choosing the choral repertoire choral teachers are often faced with the dilemma of what song they should choose. This is perhaps the most important issue for choral teachers, “there are variety of musical and nonmusical considerations in choosing literature. We must not forget that the musical literature is

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<sup>25</sup> McRae. W. Shirley, (1991) *Directing the Children's Choir*. Schilmer Books. N.Y, p. 154.

<sup>26</sup> Apfelstadt. Hilary, (2000) *First Things First Selecting Repertoire*, Music Educators Journal, July 2000, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Batey. L. Angela, (2002) *Selecting Quality Choral Literature in the High School setting*. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus, p. 43.



the foundation of the entire teaching/learning experience in choral music”<sup>28</sup>. There are many criteria on which the choral teacher should focus in selecting the repertoire. The repertoire should be meaningful and challenging, while at the same time it has to be accessible and successful and commensurate with the potential of the choristers. “Culturally responsive teaching, with its student-centered focus, suggests that we begin the repertoire selection process by considering our students rather than by perusing a publisher’s catalogue or reading through a stack of octavos”<sup>29</sup>. In choosing songs, choral teacher should select choral songs of different character and content depending on particular level and age of students. Initially one has to select music that is appropriate to the choristers' current level of musical development. Slowly but surely one can then increase the level of difficulty to a more challenging level. Every choral teacher has the important task of selecting choir repertoire that is appropriate for that particular choir. It is well known that choosing music appropriate for adolescent voices is not easy, and this requires a detailed analysis by the choral teacher. Before deciding what work to execute with the choir “the selection of music materials must be made with the maturity of the singers in mind”<sup>30</sup>. When selecting a choral repertoire, care must be taken that the songs represent a unified whole, both in terms of musical and poetic content, “wise music selection affords children a broad appreciation of many types of songs”<sup>31</sup>.

In choosing the repertoire, the choral teacher should be guided by principles and choose songs that have genuine artistic and aesthetic values and choose those values that are representative, or as Doreen says “when the quality of the repertoire is excellent, the teaching potential is unlimited”. So, it is imperative that when making a decision regarding the choice of repertoire, we must make sure that the songs have their musical-artistic values. First, choral teachers “must determine the viability of an individual piece, then turn that "storehouse" of appropriate selections into an appealing and worthwhile concert hour”<sup>32</sup>. Songs that have considerable values of musical expression as regards melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, and textural aspects, may be part of a school choir repertoire “the choral singing repertoire should provide a

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<sup>28</sup> Holcomb. Al, (2002) A Perspective on Literature for Young Choirs. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> Shaw. Julia, (2012) The Skin that We Sing Culturally Responsive Choral Music Education, Music Educators Journal June 2012, p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> McRae. W. Shirley, (1991) Directing the Children’s Choir. Schilmer Books. N.Y p. 50.

<sup>31</sup> Wilson. W Shirley, (2003) The Young Elementary School Chorus: An Introduction to Choral Singing, Music Educators Journal, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Broeker. Angela, (2002). Choosing Music for Children. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus. p. 46.

balanced offering of styles and levels of complexity, its qualities should always challenge and motivate musical learning”<sup>33</sup>. The choice of repertoire determines the musical growth of the choristers.

Often, when choosing the repertoire, choral teachers are influenced by peripheral things and try to adapt to the tastes of the choristers, thinking that the rehearsals will thus become more attractive and appealing to the choristers. But, however, choral teachers should be careful that the last thing they “should have considering in choosing literature is whether or not we think students will like it. Students reaction to literature greatly depends on how it is introduced as well as how they experience that provides challenges as well as successes. Student will enjoy rehearsals when we make rehearsals enjoyable. It should not be the responsibility of the literature to make the rehearsal “fun”<sup>34</sup>. Choral teachers are, first and foremost, educators and we may not resort to including only music that has immediate appeal to pupils and the mission of solely being entertainers. This involves selecting music that does not only have entertainment value, but also has a basis for musical growth and education.

The wise choice of the choral repertoire with all the components, both musical and content components, is the key to the success of a choral group, because through these songs the choristers will develop and be educated musically and overall, and will cultivate their musical tastes and in the future they will be music lovers and potential cultivators of genuine artistic music.

### Practical work with school choir

Like any other human skill, the choral singing skills are also developed by continuous practice-rehearsals, instruction, advice and relevant explanations that enable the acquiring and development of musical and overall skills. Undoubtedly, there are gradations, which are conditioned by the predispositions, talents, and the specific living and educational conditions. The successful implementation of choir rehearsals is a continuous process, in which in addition to the technical and professional musical requirements related to the preliminary preparations of the work with choir such as audition, rehearsal planning, song selection, methodical preparation

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<sup>33</sup> Doreen. Rao, (1991) Choral Music Experience. Volume 4, Teaching Children Throught Choral Music Experience. p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Holcomb. Al (2002) A Perspective on Literature for Young Choirs. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus, p. 50.

for choral rehearsals etc., the pedagogical behavior of choral teacher is a contributor to a successful rehearsal. Choral teacher should always keep in mind that choral rehearsals may serve a wider function than just learning music for the next concert. Therefore, teacher's positive behavior towards choristers but with realistic demands on the fulfillment of the program obligations will attract the choristers to readily and gladly attend choir rehearsals.

### Methodical Procedures for Teaching Choral Songs

When it comes to the question of what methodical procedures for reworking of songs choral teachers apply or should apply, a more specific and detailed study is warranted. Because the work with the school choir is conditioned by various factors of overall developments such as: the state of education in the country, representation-position of choral singing in the school curriculum, cultural level, choral tradition, social surroundings, cultural diversity, working conditions, professional preparedness (practical realities of teaching or the ability to exercise creativity and professionalism in teaching), school size, school location, number of choral teachers at school etc. These specifics affect choral teachers in determining what methodical process of choral song reworking-performing will be used. Also, these specifics impact on choral singing not developing equally in all countries (states), namely this may vary from city to city and even from one school to another. There are significant differences regarding the amount of time that choral teachers spend on choir rehearsals, and there are also significant differences in the manner of methodical processing of songs from one choir teacher to another. The primary purpose of any choral teacher is to get the choristers to sing independently, so he/she should choose the method he/she considers most appropriate to the level he works with because all the methods have advantages and limitations. While, choral teachers in general schools aim to train choristers for independent singing (reading the notes), however, in many cases this is hardly achievable in practice. The application of the methods for teaching choral songs should be adapted to the choir formation respectively the specific song and the realistic capabilities of the students "the effective teacher discover that the surest way to communicate an idea to the students is to have, first of all, clear conception of what is to be taught"<sup>35</sup>. Regardless of the song teaching method the choral teacher uses, the choristers should be provided with appropriate and

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<sup>35</sup> McRae. W. Shirley (1991) *Directing the Children's Choir*. Schilmer Books. N.Y, p. 3.

gradual teaching so that each rehearsal will bring you and your choir closer to your objectives using the most effective and productive strategies.

### Choir rehearsal

Chore rehearsal should not last longer than regular classes. Successful organization of choral rehearsals is achieved by adapting to the ability level of the choral group. Since we are dealing with the school choir, the duration of rehearsals should be equivalent to an ordinary class length, i.e. 40-45 min. More frequent and brief rehearsals are found to be the most successful and productive. “The rehearsal is designed to have the greatest intensity approximately two-thirds of the way through the allotted time. In a forty-minute period, you might spend the first thirteen minutes (one-third) in warm-up and organizational activities, followed by reviewing familiar musical material”<sup>36</sup>. According to Freer, “there are several ways to organize the forty or so highly prized minutes of your rehearsal... This is based on a basic tenet of lesson planning with Kodaly principles in mind. Each lesson should contain three basic elements. 1. Prepare students for something they will learn in a subsequent lesson. The preparation should provide the prior experience you will call upon during the next lesson (“remember when we did...?”). 2. Present new information or content to the students. This may be the longest segment of your rehearsal. 3. Practice something familiar, something presented in the previous lesson.

Ideally, students could use this practice component to link a section of the repertoire learned previously with the newly presented material. The basic premise here is that all three components, Prepare, Present and Practice, are part of every rehearsal”<sup>37</sup>.

At the beginning of rehearsals, an appropriate environment for further work should be created, which will elicit joy and desire for working in the choir. Choral teachers “can provide students with what they need to feel safe and free to develop as singers and musicians. The creation of this space can result in optimum conditions needed for adolescent singers to overcome apprehensions”<sup>38</sup>. Further in the rehearsals, various technical exercises (vocalizes) are

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<sup>36</sup> Freer. K Patrick, (2009) *Getting Started with Middle School Chorus*, by MENC, p. 81.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 80.

<sup>38</sup> Silvey. E. Philip, (2014) *Reducing Apprehensions of Adolescent Singers in Choral Classrooms*, Music Educators Journal March 2014, p. 54.

applied, which are intended for the choristers to master articulation, diction, breathing, legato and staccato singing, etc. These technical exercises contribute to the broadening of vocal range of choristers, and they should also be related to the song material being worked on. Choristers will have an opportunity to acquire “vocal skills through warm-up songs and exercises, breath management routines, tone building vocalizations, and positive singing experiences, they will start to differentiate between the speaking voice (the voice used as an "everyday-voice") and the singing voice (the voice used as a "musical instrument"). When the students start to find the singing voice, they will want to use it perform music- they will want to apply their skills and exercise their musicianship”<sup>39</sup>. Choral teacher during studying the score, may think of imaginative ways to introduce the new music. Perhaps there are characteristics rhythms or melodic motives that may be used in warm-up to introduce the piece.

During the remaining of the rehearsal, for the most part we practice the new song, polish it and repeat the songs learned previously. This is “most important, portion of the rehearsal focuses on new material, culminating in a performance that links the familiar music with the new”<sup>40</sup>. The introduction of new literature is probably the most critical point in e rehearsal, “how you first present a piece to the choir and how they receive it will affect the rest of the rehearsal as well as how they will work on that piece”<sup>41</sup>. Making sure that the choristers learn things correctly in the beginning pays off in term of time saved and frustration avoided. If difficulties are encountered in learning the song, choral teacher should prepare special exercises to eliminate them, depending on the area where the problem arises. Pedagogical practice teaches us that creating the right vocal habits is more successful if it begins at the right time, before the choristers have created negative singing habits. Also, at this stage we will pay special attention to the artistic perfecting of the song, singing with dynamic nuances, closing phrases, clear articulation, etc.

In the third portion of the rehearsal “the final thirteen minutes are spent by either polishing previously presented repertoire or introduction of music to be learned in subsequent

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<sup>39</sup> Doreen. Rao, (1991) Choral Music Experience. Volume 4, Teaching Children Through Choral Music Experience, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Freer. K Patrick, (2009) Getting Started with Middle School Chorus, by MENC, p. 81.

<sup>41</sup> Batey. L. Angela, (2002) Selecting Quality Choral Literature in the High School setting. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus, p. 43.

sessions”<sup>42</sup>. The songs will be further polished by insisting on the elements of the right singing, the right tempo, the right breathing, the unified tone, etc.

Through the conducting of choral rehearsals, it is aimed at achieving musical requirements as it should be every choral teacher's goal to develop to the utmost each chorister's ability to enjoy music with perception, sensitivity and developing musicianship. "As part of the music education profession, the choral director has an obligation to combine performance with responsibility for long-term development of the chorister. This development is a combination of musical skills and conceptual understandings that produces an educated musician”<sup>43</sup>.

### School Choir Public Performances

Considering that the school choir, during the school year, delivers performances in various cultural, artistic and educational events at school and outside, the choral teacher should first consider the type of activity during annual appearances with the school choir, in order to make the necessary professional or technical preparations. It is only natural that the school choir will appear from time to time in different programs, with only a few songs so as to enrich the overall school program that can be intertwined with other music and poetry pieces or speeches. In these cases, the choral teacher, besides having to adapt the song repertoire to the character of the program, should also know the exact minutes available for the choir performance, and know what else will be included in the program (instrumentals, dance, theatrical sketches, etc.) in order to have good coordination for the smooth running of the program. On this information will also depend the sequencing of pieces that will be interpreted by the choir. In cases where the program is combined with other pieces, especially dances or instrumentals that are rhythmically and melodically more joyous, it is best to have the choir perform first, because, after such interpretations, part of the audience may lose interest in listening choral pieces, which are well known to be quieter in terms of nature of the interpretation.

The choral teacher should know the time and location in advance, namely when and where the program is taking place, considering that he should be coordinated with a significant

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<sup>42</sup>Freer. K Patrick, (2009) Getting Started with Middle School Chorus, by MENC, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> Broeker. Angela, (2002) Choosing Music for Children. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus. p. 47.

number of participants in these events, as choristers, parents, etc. The choral teacher should send a notice to parents stating the concert date, time, and location, the student dress code, the attendance policy, the performers expected arrival and departure times, and schools policies on photography and videotaping. Collaboration with parents is indispensable for the well-going of choral performance, “no choir program is going to be successful without the ongoing cooperation of the families of children themselves”<sup>44</sup>. Also, in the notice, include a statement such as: "If you bring a young child to the concert who might make 'joyful noise' than the composer intended, please be seated toward the rear of the auditorium so that you may take your child to lobby if necessary."<sup>45</sup>

After each performance, the members of the choir will be curious to know how they did, and praises for good interpretation should not be lacking, in order to stimulate them, “if teacher want non-motivated students to become motivated, they must first insure that a student has actually experienced success...”<sup>46</sup>. Even in case of a poor interpretation, the choral teacher should know how to analyze the shortcomings in order to remedy them so that next performance is more successful. Thank them for their support and invite them to work together to achieve the goals and objectives for future concerts.

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<sup>44</sup> McRae. W. Shirley, (1991) *Directing the Children's Choir*. Schilmer Books. N.Y, p.7

<sup>45</sup> Freer. K Patrick, (2009) *Getting Started with Middle School Chorus*, by MENC p. 106.

<sup>46</sup> Bowers. Judy, (2002) *Classroom Management in Choral Settings*. Spotlight on Teaching Chorus, p. 8.

### III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Methodolgy

This research was carried out using a combined method (quantitative and qualitative), through which data were obtained that enabled detailed analysis of the issue.

The research was conducted in 2 phases:

1. Data was collected through the quantitative research – through the questionnaire and interviews with the choral teachers.
2. Qualitative phase of qualitative data collection and analysis of songs performed with choir.

#### Research sample

This study focuses on the teachers of music education in lower secondary education (grades 6-9), in Prishtina (capital of Kosovo) and its surroundings and Skopje (capital of Macedonia) and its surrounding areas. This way of differentiating groups of music teachers is common in most music education studies.

In Prishtina and its vicinity there are approximately 42 teachers working with choirs. The response rate was 37 returned questionnaires or 88% collected, but during the processing of data 4 questionnaires (9%) were eliminated as incomplete and containing contradictory data.

A total of 79% of the questionnaires completed were analyzed and compared during this research. While in Skopje and its surroundings there are approximately 74 teachers working with choirs. The response rate was 42 returned questionnaires or 57% collected, but during the processing of data, 8 questionnaires (10%) were eliminated for reasons that they were incomplete and contained contradictory data. A total of 47% of completed questionnaires were analyzed and compared during this research.



## Research tools

For the purpose of collecting information, a questionnaire has been compiled. The questionnaire initially contains explanations for the respondents, i.e. what is the purpose of the research, what is the significance of their participation in this research, who is carrying out the research, who will use the results of this research, the confidentiality guarantee, the guidelines on how the questionnaire should be filled out, as well as the contact details of the researcher, if necessary. Also, the questionnaire is divided into two sections:

Section A, contains data related to demographic information about respondents (choral teachers).

Section B, which contains questions related to the perception of respondents and their beliefs related to choral singing in general education. The questions are designed to get responses as regards organizing a school choir, choosing the choristers, selecting the repertoire, and dealing with the difficulties encountered when working with the choir.

Section C, through which material was collected regarding songs that were performed in the choir.

The questionnaire contains different variations of questions, such as multiple answers questions, open questions, selection list questions, etc. Since the questionnaire was conducted in two different countries, it is compiled in two languages, in Albanian and Macedonian, through which data presented in this research were obtained.

The questionnaires were used to measure respondents' views and to investigate the correlations between the different characteristics of respondents surveyed. Also, interviews with choral teachers were conducted, providing practical details from their work experience in non-classroom music activities, respectively school choir.

## Measurements

In the 1<sup>st</sup> phase, data were collected through questionnaires, which will be filled out by choral teachers in general schools of Prishtina and Skopje. Questionnaires had 13 questions which have covered the scope of the study. Questions were formulated in accordance with the professional nature of the choral teachers respondents and the information that we want to get from them. All questionnaires were compiled in accordance with the requirements of the

research problem and their role in this process.

While in the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase data were collected through semi-structured interview, which were conducted with focus groups with teachers of the professional field (music), in both cities (Prishtina and Skopje). The interview contains questions similar to the questionnaire, but also additional questions to which teachers did not have the space to answer in the questionnaire. The interview refers to practical details from the experience of teachers in working with the school choir, which will then be compared and analyzed with the views and opinions of the teachers expressed through the questionnaires.

### Data collection and administration

Quantitative research data was processed through the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program. Questionnaires with the choral teachers in Prishtina were administered by the researcher himself in 37 schools. While with the choral teachers in Skopje, it was administered by the researcher in 42 schools.

Regarding the interviews, they were conducted by the researcher and an assistant who helped with the note-taking. Interviews with choral teachers in Skopje were also conducted by the researcher with the help of a colleague from Macedonia.

Interviews with choral singing teachers were recorded and transcribed, preserving the authenticity of teachers' communication methods.

### Analysis of results

The data collected during the first phase will be analyzed through the SPSS. We'll provide descriptions through analysis, where we can provide a summary of the views of respondents regarding the problem of this research.

In addition to the quantitative analysis and comparison of the data, ten choral scores (4 songs in Albanian and 4 songs in Macedonian language) will be analyzed in terms of musical detail and content.

There will also be the transcription of the interviews. In the end we will compare the answers that choral teachers have provided through questionnaires and interviews.

## IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

### INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This section is reserved for the interpretation of findings combined with the literature analysis, theories, and research on the given field. It is known that students' benefits from participating in school choir ensembles are multidimensional. This contributes to the development of music and their overall development. In addition, it even contributes to their way of life as Rutter says, "In an age where the solitude of the computer screen drives people away and threatens to oust real group activity, the world needs its choir ensembles more than ever before, in church, school, concert halls, and community."<sup>47</sup> From this point of view, music education teachers' responsibility to organize choir ensemble work is not a professional obligation only, but also moral. Working with the school choir ensembles is very complex. It consists of an entirety that has a chain function. If one link or part is not properly used, it will be directly reflected in choir ensemble's proficiency and quality. Singing in lower secondary schools is not that easy. If it were, it would be more widespread than it actually is, as it is said that, "singing in lower secondary school is actually a specialism within a specialism"<sup>48</sup>. In spite of challenges, choral teachers must develop this music activity as much as possible within the framework of their schools. It is the very focus of this study that highlights various components that affect the functioning of school choir ensembles; it is an important activity for the overall education of choristers. The first thing the choral teacher does in this regard is the selection of choristers. The findings show that 70.1% of choral teachers do the selection individually. 22.4% of them do it in a combination form, and 7.5% do it in group. It is worth pointing out that 87.9% of Prishtina teachers with its surrounding areas did this selection individually.

Based on the appropriate pedagogical approach and the reviewed literature, it is revealed that this percentage is not at all in line with the contemporary pedagogical and methodological requirements, which are widely dealt with in this study in subsection (p.12-14). In normal situations this percentage is very high. It would be wise for teachers working with the same

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<sup>47</sup> Cited in: <https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/30171/03part2chapter1-2.pdf?sequence=4> (download 11.11.2018 13:41h).

<sup>48</sup> Ashley. Martin, (2015) Singing in the Lower secondary school. United Kingdom: Oxford, p. 1.

students to choose them in common music education classes. This issue has more extensively been dealt with in the literature review chapter. When the teacher is in constant contact with the students, s/he can select them as choral members in the classroom on random basis, even without students being aware that their musical abilities are being tested. This is done given that if students were aware of being tested, their fears, shyness, confusion would overwhelm them, and therefore they could not fully demonstrate their musical abilities. “Some teachers believe that the negative influence of pointing out an uncertain singer to his peers is immaterial.”<sup>49</sup> Although the audition is important for some reasons since it provides information about the child's personality, background, musicianship, and vocal ability, we must be very careful when doing it, as Shirley says, “the term ‘audition’ may have a negative connotation, implying possible rejection from an elite group.”<sup>50</sup> Or as Freer said, “imagine a seventh grader who summoned enough courage to audition for you, only to be told s/he wasn't good enough to participate. Would he or she ever sing for you again? Perhaps, but it is not likely.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, audition in general education schools should only be demonstrated in situations where the choral teacher is not familiar prior with his/her students, and this will enable him/her to select students who have musical predispositions to participate in the choir.

School choir ensemble consists of students of different ages and of two genders (both sexes). As far as gender representation is concerned, findings show that females dominate with approximately 83% in total. However, in some cases (e.g. 4 in Skopje with its surrounding areas and one in Prishtina with its surrounding areas) choirs are composed of female gender only. It is revealed that female choristers dominate in today's school choir ensembles. There are many reasons why this phenomenon is apparent. It is males' choristers' voice change that is experienced during this age. However, different authors mention other factors too. According to Martin, “part of the problem here may be with the use word Choir. It is none that boys do not want to sing, per se, it is that they are anxious about the identity membership of a choir will give them. Perhaps they may also worry about the level of commitment demanded. The frequency with which the large majority of young people, girls and boys consistently use the two words “posh” and “elderly” when talking to me about choir membership is unrelenting. A young person

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<sup>49</sup> Haworth. Janice L., *Elementary School Choirs and Auditions*. Music Educators Journal, 00274321, 19920101, Vol. 79, Issue 4.

<sup>50</sup> McRae. W. Shirley, (1991) *Directing the Children's Choir*. Schilmer Books. N.Y, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Freer. K Patrick, (2009) *Getting Started with Middle School Chorus*, by MENC, p. 11.

perceived as a lackey of the posh and the elderly undoubtedly will be seen as uncool in all but a few cases".<sup>52</sup> Their preferences toward sport activities – relying on males' innate nature particularly at this age – must be another reason. Perhaps this diminishes their desire to participate in choral activities. There are opinions that males of this age are easily influenced. Sweet shows, "that males attend choir sessions if they are motivated to do so by others who have the same interest in singing"<sup>53</sup> Colleagues' influence also intensifies during this age. Thus, in the eyes of a teenage boy, the choir ensemble cannot have the prestige of other activities.

Although choral performance in schools continues to be one of the most common musical performance events, school choir ensembles (especially in Kosovo) are organized only sometimes; they do not function at all times. As regard to having rehearsals as one of the most important components of this activity, there are great differences between Prishtina and Skopje schools. 73.6% of the choral teachers in Prishtina with its surrounding areas work from time to time with choir ensemble, while 26.4% of them work only regularly. On the other hand, 100% of choral teachers in Skopje with its surrounding areas do work regularly with choir ensembles. Findings reveal that the majority of choir ensembles have not developed working habits at all. This is better showed by the high percentage of choir ensembles in Kosovo, which are activated only sometimes depending on the "daily" requirements and needs. Anyway, this is reflected on sound and program qualities offered by these choir ensembles. The greatest difference between Prishtina and Skopje is reflected in the function and sounding features of choir ensembles.

As far as rehearsals are concerned, it is related to the data we have introduced above. However, it is dependent on functioning or non-functioning of the choir during the whole school year (when choir ensembles do not work all the time, it is difficult to expect a balanced work during the week). Findings show that 67.6% of teachers in Skopje with its surrounding rehearse twice a week, whereas 32.4% rehears more than twice. In Prishtina with its surrounding areas, on the other hand, despite the fact that a great number of choir ensembles are activated only sometimes, 30.8% of teachers have declared to rehearse only once a week. The highest percentage is particularly observed in rural areas – in the suburb of Prishtina, where 42.9% rehears only

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<sup>52</sup> Ashley. Martin, (2015) *Singing in the Lower secondary school*. United Kingdom: Oxford, p. 161.

<sup>53</sup>Cited in: Sweet. B, (2010) A case study: Middle school boys' perceptions of singing and participation in choir. *Applications of Research in Music Education*, 28 (2), 5-12, p. 11.

once a week. This is evident, because teachers working in rural schools work in two, and sometimes even in three different school buildings to supplement the weekly teaching working hours, and they are forced to have rehearsals once a week only. In some schools, the number of students is just small.

The functioning of choir ensembles regularly throughout the whole school year, as mentioned above, was reflected in the entire process of working with choir ensembles, or on all parts of the choral singing. This is also reflected in the number and quality of songs that choir ensembles have ever performed during the school year. Findings show that in the quantitative aspect 67.6 of teachers in Skopje with its surrounding areas performed more than four songs, whereas in Prishtina with its surrounding areas only 39.4% of the teachers have performed more than four songs, though this result refers more to quantity rather than the quality of songs.

When referring to choral repertoire choosing the repertoire should, “include a balanced offering from simple and accessible music to more complex and challenging repertoire in a wide variety of styles, and periods representative of your culture and other diverse culture of the world”<sup>54</sup>. Or as Doreen says, when the quality of the repertoire is excellent, the teaching potential is unlimited.

Since the selection and performance of choral repertoire is the main component through which the qualitative aspect of a choir ensemble is revealed, more attention was paid to it. Following, we will introduce the findings on this issue through a more detailed analysis of choral songs that choral teachers have performed with choir ensembles.

There has been analyzed and compared the song repertoire from the last three performances in front of the public, where all songs that teachers responded to have performed with choirs are listed firstly. Eight of the songs that we considered to have been worked out most, have been singled out. The most particular songs that are mostly worked out in Prishtina with its surrounding areas are, *A kanë ujë ato burime*, *Për mëmëdhenë*, *Lule bore* and *Vajta n’Elbasan*. On the other hand, the most worked out songs in Skopje with its surrounding areas are, *мајска песна*, *Борјано-Борјанке*, *пеперуга* and *Огин го гори Брезово*. Following we will introduce these songs analyzed with all musical and content components such as formal structure, the way

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<sup>54</sup>Doreen. Rao, (1991) Choral Music Experience. Volume 4, Teaching Children Throught Choral Music Experience, p. 9.

melody and rhythm were organized, the importance of the theme/rhythmic material, the voices, the high points of the phrases, the harmonic structure, the way the cadences approached.

Findings reveal that the majority of choral teachers in Kosovo were determined to produce popular songs with some minor exclusion. It is noted that popular songs were mainly added the accompanying voice (the 2<sup>nd</sup> voice), and consequently, in some cases these songs lost their originality (the course and clarity of the song faded in melodic, rhythmic, and formal form). In terms of the content-poetic aspect, these songs in some cases exceed the level limits of school choir ensembles. The songs usually begin in unisons, then are divided into the refrain part (or other appropriate parts), more frequently in the interval of third (3<sup>rd</sup> by repeating the theme into imitation, thus preserving the idea of the theme, but with very modest development in the vertical-harmonic aspect. Other voices that are modified develop in different ways, but in a very simple form being repeated into mimic form or by turning to unisons. Sometimes, other voices develop with different ways known as "melodic coverings", where the original meaning of the song is lost. In general terms, the harmony of the songs was simple, but in some cases a lot of movements of chords, even by using critical sounds applied. During song analysis, the loudness between the voices (the distance) is observed; low voices in very low notes and original voice in loud voice, thus losing the beauty and originality. Namely, all these developments are the result of inadequate choices for school choir ensembles, and their adaptation or processing (possibly imposed in the absence of adequate literature) without professionalism from non-professional people.

From the analysis of songs that have been performed in Macedonia, it is noticed that the choral repertoire is not dominated by popular songs only. It also contains authorship songs dedicated to school choir ensembles. In general terms, the songs have a more concise development with logical rhythms. It has been noted that the length within the range and their selection in the phrases was performed (logically) without any contradictions between voices. Songs generally have rhythm and more rhythmic values, while in terms of melodic development they develop only gradually. The melodies are simple and suitable for school choir ensembles and clear in regard to educational pedagogical requirements. Also the poetic content of textbooks is appropriate for the level of school choir ensembles with some exceptions (to popular songs). The harmony of songs was more advanced with the use of chords with greater demands in their

performance. "Melody filling" was characteristic of Macedonian songs, which enabled a (polyphonic) dialogue between them, whereas in pedagogical terms these methods are a good basis for the melodic development of children. The fragments (themes) of music detached and adapted to other voices preserve song's originality and strengthen it thematically as is the case in the song "Борјано, Борјанке".

Generally speaking, in Kosovo and Macedonia (particularly in Kosovo), the dominance of popular music is emphasized in the repertoires of school choir ensembles. It is absolutely essential that children learn popular songs from their own culture and are exposed to the traditional music from other cultures within this country's diverse and rich cultural heritage. However, we should provide choristers with a more comprehensive repertoire that gives them greater opportunities for musical and overall development. Based on detailed analysis of songs, it is generally revealed that these songs are too simple for a choir, which intends to work consistently, and provide modest opportunities for musical and aesthetic development. But based on the real situation that most choir ensembles, especially in Kosovo, are activated only according to the "daily needs and requirements", these songs revolve around this reality.

For choral teachers to perform the repertoire with the right musical and aesthetic demands, this depends on the resources and assets available to them. The findings of our study show that the access to various sources for choir choices was the concern of the majority of choir leaders. In many countries worldwide, especially on the places where choral music has a long and prosperous tradition, there is abundant choral literature; choral teachers find it difficult to determine or choose among the many songs available to them. Among other things, they have the opportunity and chance to use school or city libraries, which are equipped with choral songs. In addition, there are databases with accurate song data available to them.\*<sup>55</sup> The study reveals that the majority of teachers use different sources on individual basis. It also reveals that when referring to other sources, in total, 25.4% of teachers were declared to use Internet (especially for foreign language songs). While 41.8% of teachers declared to be using choral literature from different sources such as: the material they possess from their prior study education, personal libraries, other folk music books, collaboration with other teachers, edition according to the

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<sup>55</sup> I had the opportunity to see it during my experience on the study tour (from 10/01 to 10/03/2018) at IU (Indiana University-Bloomington) as well as the professional collaboration I had with Professor Brent Gault at IU.



character of the holiday, arranging popular songs from different authors as needed, etc., 32.8% of teachers claim to use songs that are available on music textbooks. According to them these songs are not dedicated to choir ensembles since they are mostly common songs that are adapted in the classroom, with very modest music constructions. However, in some cases these songs are added harmonic-vertical component, and adapted to the needs and the interpretative possibilities of the choir. Thus, there are many reasons that impose the way of selecting choral songs. Teachers point out that music education textbooks are not composed of choral songs that will ease their work. The lack of a school library and the lack of tradition for choral material archiving cause difficulties in their work. This implies that teachers themselves arrange or process simple songs (the quality leaves much to be desired). Teachers had to choose songs of adult choristers or popular songs that in most cases are not at all suitable for this level of choir ensemble.

It has been said that the functioning of choir ensemble is chained; a non-functioning link reflects or affects another link. If one of the components that create choral entirety does not work properly, it is reflected in the other part. Regarding choir's public performance inside or outside the school, the findings reveal intriguing data. We refer to findings that relate more to out-of-school performances when it is known that the opportunity to perform inside the school is easier and does not depend heavily on external influences. When performing out-of-school, programs are also dependent on collaboration with institutions, organizations, or individuals outside the school, who can organize different cultural activities or manifestations, where the choir as a representative school formation participates. Study findings show that 9.1% of teachers in Prishtina with its surrounding areas usually participate in cultural programs outside the school; while in Skopje 41.2% of them take part in these events. On the other hand, 42.4% of Prishtina teachers with its surroundings areas and 52.9% of teachers in Skopje with the surroundings rarely are introduced in front of the public. While 48.5% of teachers in Prishtina with its surrounding areas do not participate in cultural activities outside the school, in Skopje with the surrounding areas only 5.9% do not participate at all in cultural activities. Since most of choir ensembles in Prishtina with its surrounding areas operate only from time to time, it is expected that there will be less introductions publicly compared to the choir ensembles in Skopje with the surrounding areas. However, there are other reasons that affect this too. Among them is the introduction of festivals or choral competitions. While there are no choral competitions between schools in Kosovo at any level whatsoever, in Macedonia, on the other hand, such competitions

which at first are organized on municipal level (where school choirs are competing within municipalities), and then the best ones compete in national level.

Indeed the accompanying infrastructure (be it professional or technical) is of great importance for a proper organization and proper functioning of choir work. Teachers are faced with various difficulties while working with choir ensembles. Findings indicate that teachers in Prishtina and Skopje with the surrounding areas have had different opinions about some issues, but in many cases, have had the same views and expressed their opinions about improving the position of choral singing at schools. To choral teachers in Prishtina with the surrounding areas, we find the following data: the working hours with choir ensembles are not counted under the weekly working teaching hours, there is a lack of choral songs in the mother tongue, there is a lack of choral competitions, there is a lack of vocational training, teachers are engaged in different schools (this applies more to the teachers working in rural schools), there is a small number of music classes, there is an inadequate timing of class attendance, there is a lack of instruments and conditions for work, etc.

Regarding the most characteristic findings in Skopje with the surrounding areas in relation to the difficulties the teachers' face when working with choir ensembles are: there is students' overloading with other activities, there is a large number of classes and other courses that have been added recently, choristers do not rehearse on regular basis, there are difficulties in finding enough space for rehearsals due to two shift classes within the school, the same students are engaged in different activities, there is a small number of students in some schools (especially in rural areas), there is a lack of musical instruments, etc.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### CONCLUSIONS

This study, which aimed to ascertain the real situation of choral singing in lower secondary education in Kosovo and compare it with the choral singing in Macedonia, highlighted a considerable number of findings. These findings aim to improve choir future working practices. From comparative analysis and ground research, it has been noted that despite choral teachers' work to increase the cultural level in general and the development of musical skills in particular, there are a numerous things they need to carefully consider. It is very important that the relevant policy-making institutions of education take into account this issue with extra care, so that the introduction of music teaching outside the classroom, respectively choral singing is not formal only, but also qualitative. This will contribute to the musical, artistic, and versatile development of students.

This study highlights the real situation prevailing in the context of choral singing in general education, its functioning, the repertoire performed by choir ensembles, the position of choral singing in the curriculum, etc. The findings show the unfavorable position of choral singing and the challenges and difficulties faced by choral teachers when working with choir ensembles. There are significant differences in Kosovo and Macedonia teachers' work (i.e. teachers of Prishtina with its surrounding areas and Skopje with its surrounding areas). There are many reasons that contributed to such great differences between these two neighboring countries. Among the main findings of this study, which are related to these differences are the position of choral singing in respective curricula of these 2 countries. Consequently, a series of issues that directly affect the functioning and organization of choir ensembles' work came out. Despite the fact that Kosovo has just drafted the new curriculum, choral singing as an important out-of-class music activity is not included in the curriculum at all. Even in spite of the insistence of music professionals<sup>56</sup>, it has not found the support of policy makers in the framework of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST). In curricula only recommendations, which do not

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<sup>56</sup> I was a member of this working group for the curriculum field of arts <https://masht.rks.gov.net/uploads/2015/10/ang-ëorking-3-masht.pdf>.

oblige teachers to work with choir ensembles are provided; working with choir ensembles was not anticipated to be counted under the weekly teaching hours. It states that, “It is recommended that all students have an opportunity to be involved in extra-curriculum activities, in accordance with their preferences and personal talents and be part of a group in various activities like sports teams, music groups, dancing troops, choir ensembles, theatre troops, and community support groups.”<sup>57</sup> In the previous curriculum, choral singing had had a more worthy place, where it was stated that, “*working with choir ensembles is a special and compulsory form of elementary, lower and upper secondary education. Choir ensembles are composed of students with pronounced musical skills based on their interest... The teacher's work is counted under the weekly teaching hours (from 2 to 4 depending on the level).*”<sup>58</sup> It is exactly such a position of choral singing within the newly-established curriculum that is reflected in the whole process of further work with the choir. In this context, teachers’ work with choir ensembles is not counted under the workload of weekly working hours, although they are often required – by school leaders during different school events – to introduce choral performances. However, this is done only on voluntarily basis, but never as a professional work lying within the program requirements. Even in the best scenario, when teachers work with choir ensembles, they are only activated from time to time (when needed in different cultural events). This issue has the “domino effect”, and is always reflected on the organizational entirety of a choral group such as: on the amount of rehearsals held during the week, on the number of songs that will be performed, on the quality of songs to be performed, on the program performances inside and outside of school, etc. It was noted that the exclusion of choral singing in the curriculum and failing to count it under the working teaching hours, had negative effects on teachers’ work in Kosovo, which is reflected negatively at all components we stressed above.

On the other hand, choral singing in Macedonian curriculum is much more favorable. This was revealed by the interviews conducted with choral teachers in Skopje with its surrounding areas, and by relying on relevant documents. During this study, it has been observed that, thanks to this representation, the real situation in practice is better, and this has created a more distinct difference in functioning and organization of choir ensemble work in Skopje with

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<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Core Curriculum for Kosovo's lower and upper secondary education. Prishtina, August 2016, p. 107.

<sup>58</sup> Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Curriculum 5 for the fifth grade, Prishtina, December 2005 p. 127.

the surrounding areas. The Bureau of Educational Development in Macedonia has anticipated that choral singing is, “necessary for the school to prepare programs and organize activities for celebrating important holidays... These activities are mandatory so that to enable students to present the results and achievements in front of their parents and other people in the local environment and beyond. Through these activities, the school shows its achievements in education and students’ free activities (choir, orchestra, drama and literary groups, artistic activities, etc.). These activities are anticipated by the curriculum and are supported by certain financial means for education from municipal funds and other donations.”<sup>59</sup> It is also anticipated that working with choir ensembles is counted under weekly working hours “from 2 to 5 hours per week (depending on the development of choir ensemble), i.e. 72 to 180 hours per year”.<sup>60</sup> It has also been precisely defined so that the excessive burden of students with free-activities is avoided, whereby each student participates in a free activity. Students who attend the choir ensemble or school orchestra can be engaged up to three hours a week. This meritorious place of choral activities within the curriculum, and counting it under weekly working hours, even in proportion to the level of performance, not only motivates the teachers, but also obliges them to consider it as a program and professional requirement. Contrarily, in Kosovo, the position of choir in curriculum framework and not counting the choral classes under weekly working hours make teachers feel they are not responsible for organizing school choir ensembles; this whole process remains under teachers’ conscience, individually.

Among the main findings of the study, in addition to the position of choral singing in the curriculum, the lack of choral songs for children in their mother tongue (in Kosovo) is a problem too. The findings show that both components have led choral teachers to perform songs with little artistic and musical requirements. Thus, on the one hand, there is the lack of teachers’ responsibility which results from non-programmatic obligations towards curriculum, non-counting working hours with choirs, and on the other hand, there is the lack of choral songs for children in their mother tongue, which is reflected in the repertoire they have performed in Prishtina with its surrounding areas.

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<sup>59</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Bureau of Educational Development, CONCEPT of nine-year primary education, February 2007, p. 65.

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, p. 50.

In general, the findings show that the repertoire performed by school choir ensembles did not have a variety of songs that would represent musical values which include songs of different genres and styles of the respective age. Choral teachers were not structured as they were involved in selecting the repertoire. In most cases, choral teachers have followed little or no professional criteria at all. They have applied other criteria in selecting choral songs, and have performed simple songs with modest music requirements, by selecting the most attractive songs that attract much more the choristers and give a spectacle to the public. Findings indicate that in the absence of choral songs for children in their mother tongue, the choice of repertoire is dominated by popular songs. Moreover, some of these songs are easily processed and adapted to the choir's needs (mainly in 2 voices, or singing in unison, and then in certain places separated in 2 voices). However, it is not only the lack of choral songs for children the reason related to this selection, the data suggest that many of these choral teachers believe that programming a high percentage of popular music is important for keeping students on choir ensembles. According to the choral teachers, popular songs are more attractive for choristers and their practical performance is achieved faster and more easily. Some teachers emphasize that when they are determined to choose songs they perform with choir ensembles they always have in mind the public, because classical songs are not often welcomed as popular songs are. Also in the absence of proper choral literature, choral teachers often choose adult choir compositions then adapt them to the children's choir. However, the thematic musical aspect, particularly the textual content of these songs for adults, as well as most of the popular songs that have been performed with the choir ensembles, are not in accordance to the level and requirements of the choir. One of the main factors that affect this "excessive" variety is probably due to the fact that there is no standard or curriculum requirement that anticipates, suggests, or obliges the teacher to, at least, meet the minimum requirements, not only about song selection, but also about the level of choral interpretation.

And finally, we are adding an opinion to the main findings of this study that choral teachers should work in a way that contributes to future singers who will sing in an adult choir ensemble tomorrow. From my 10 year experience of working out with children's choir ensemble in Gjilan, I can say that today some of choristers, even though they are now dentists, architects, economists etc., still continue their performance in the Mix choir ensemble (adult choir) of

Gjilan. Moreover, in some cases they are the most prominent promoters of this formation, considering that this choir's work extends completely under voluntarily basis only.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings outlined above necessarily lead to some beneficial and important conclusions to relevant institutions, particularly to education policy makers in Kosovo. In order for the choral singing position to advance, i.e. in order for the musical education teaching outside the classroom to prosper, a maximal engagement of relevant experts, MEST, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education, choral teachers, school principals, MED managers, and different cultural institutions that extend their influence to policymakers on issues related to music education in general, is needed. These recommendations will be presented in accordance with the objectives of the study mentioned above.

### **Recommendations to Relevant and Decision-making Institutions for Education Policies**

- MEST (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology)

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology should review the curricular part related to the extra-curriculum activities outside the classroom (referred to as extra curriculum). This automatically classifies choir's workload under weekly working hours.

MEST in cooperation with MEDs, the Faculty of Arts, and the Faculty of Education should organize choral competitions on all education levels.

Since MEST is currently in the phase of reviewing and publishing new textbooks, it is the right moment for music education authors to include choral songs on the music textbooks for the appropriate level. They may also attach choral songs on the appendixes of the textbooks.

- Municipal Education Directorate (MED)

Municipal Education Directorates should organize choral competitions on municipal level. A genuine cooperation between MEST, MEDs, and schools must be established.

MEDs should provide professional support to choral teachers by holding trainings for the respective domain (the training must be held by qualified conductors or distinguished choral teachers).

MED, as the employer, should oblige musical education teachers that in addition to classroom sessions to carry out activities/teaching outside the classroom too.

Besides, it should support school choirs in logistical terms (i.e. in travelling terms, workshops, dressing, food, and so on).

- Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education

The Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of Education, and MEST should coordinate choral teacher trainings in general education schools at all levels.

The Faculty of Arts in cooperation with its composers (i.e. composition professors of the faculty) should compose choral songs for children in their mother tongue.

Faculty of Arts should compile a program for composing students to compose song for children's choir such as canon, 2 and 3 voice songs in accordance to the requirements of this level. (Although to the composing students it is but a modest requirement, such songs would highly serve to choral students and teachers in general education schools).

Conductor and Choral singing Professors (at Musical Pedagogy domain operating under the Faculty of Arts) should enrich the course syllabi so that future teachers will not only teach manual instructional techniques, but provide lessons to work with school choirs.

Musicians and composers should create ambitious projects so that the lack of choral songs for children in their native language is present.

- The school management

The school management should support choral teachers, provide enough space for practical sessions, provide at least a piano (or at least one relevant instrument to be used during choral practical sessions), support the school choir with the accompanying infrastructure (same-shirt uniforms or similar blouses for choral singers, photocopies for partitures, etc.), ensure transportation and food during public performances outside the school, etc.



- Choral teachers

Choral teachers should organize choir work as a professional requirement; they should select choral songs of artistic values which challenge and develop musical and overall choral singers' education. In addition, they should cooperate with the choral singers, parents, other teachers, school management and other relevant factors; they should further participate in show-programs internally and externally, provide the choral singers artistic value, pleasure, and fun in addition to choral teaching.

Choral teachers should create a school musical archive, save part songs (songs sheets), audio recordings. This would facilitate the colleagues' work to better provide choral parts, and serve to prevent the choral program from being repeated often.

- Other teachers

Other teachers should support choral teachers, particularly during practical sessions (when it is known that they have to deal with a large group of students of different classes, who attend classes in different shifts).

- Parents

Parents should cooperate and assist choral teachers on all working stages (especially during public performances outside the school, and adhere to the timetables to their children's transportation and take care for their appearance, etc.)

## Contribution of the thesis

- Exploring the actual situation of the functioning of choir ensembles in general education.
- Identifying the functioning of the choir ensembles in general education (within the special forms of out-of-class music teaching).
- Assessing the level of functioning of choirs ensembles based on school practices (how they organize the school choir, how they choose the choristers, how they choose the repertoire, etc.).
- Analyzing choral songs in terms of music and content.
- Identifying, from the perspectives of the choral teachers themselves, what are the difficulties encountered in working with choir.
- Analyzing the position of choral singing in the curriculum.
- Comparing the differences regarding choral singing in the schools of Pristina and Skopje (Kosovo and Macedonia).
- Identifying similarities and differences between choral teachers work in Kosovo and Macedonia.
- Identifying approaches to how the choir should be empowered at school level.
- Identifying of factors which it paves the way for improvement for choral work.
- Highlighting findings and conclusions to improve choir future working practices.
- Giving recommendations to relevant institutions for education policies.

## Other achievements during the PhD study- pedagogical, scientific and artistic

- 23.02.2017 - **Mixed Methods Research and Cycles of Changes Workshop/** Transformational Leadership Program – Scholarships and Partnerships (TLP-SP).
- 16.03.2017 - **Hybrid Teaching for the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Classroom /** Arizona State University Melikian Center & University of Prishtina Center for Teaching Excellence.
- 6 - 9.06.2017- **Scientific Summer Symposium Research Workshop/** Transformational Leadership Program – Scholarships and Partnerships (TLP-SP).
- 13.02.2018 - **10<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Higher Educational Pedagogy Pre-Conference Workshop /** Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia.
- 14 – 16.02.2018 - 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Higher Educational Pedagogy / **Featuring 20 hours of speakers, research, practice, conversation, and poster sessions.**
- 10.01 – 10.03. 2018 - **Faculty in Residence Program /** Indiana University & TLP-SP.
- 16 - 17 June 2018 - Young Science Forum for Music and Dance 13<sup>th</sup> edition, New Bulgarian University. **Historical overview of the choral singing in Kosovo.**
- 10.06. 2017 **Concert with the choir of AAB University.**
- 28.11.2017 **Concert with City Choir – Gjilan.**
- 17.02.2018 **Concert with City Choir – Gjilan.**
- 30.05. 2018 **Concert with the choir of AAB University.**
- 27.11.2018 **Concert with City Choir – Gjilan.**

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